

OTTAWA JEWISH BULLETIN & REVIEW

THE CASE FOR "EQUITY GIVING"

The most extensive re-appraisal of individual giving to the United Jewish Appeal ever undertaken by this community is to be launched next week, according to an announcement by Norman Zagerman, President of the Ottawa Vaad Ha'Ir. It will be a long-range process which will take time and effort but the results are considered to be vital to the future well-being of the Jewish community.

The plan, approved in principle on April 6, is designed to establish "equity" in fund-raising through a stepped-up program of education and orientation, leading hopefully to a better understanding of the needs of Israel and the local community and resulting in increased identification and commitment. The program has been dubbed "Operation Upgrade".

It will be backed in the first instance by the weight of public opinion and the moral suasion of the synagogues, the schools, the Centre and the other agencies and institutions which provide services for young and old in the Jewish Community of Ottawa. All have agreed to co-operate and to act in concert with each other should further steps be needed to implement the plan.

The concept of a viable and vibrant Jewish community lies at the heart of the issue. Schools and centres and camps have to be maintained if Jewish life itself is to be sustained. One may no longer use a particular communal service because children are grown or needs change. But there will be the grandchildren and those who come after them for whom we must provide if they too will be Jews. Also at stake is the need to recognize that we are all responsible for each other and that what hurts a Jew in Moscow or in Jerusalem should find an echoing response in the heart of a Jew in Ottawa.

Although the principle of "fair-share giving" has been discussed before, this is the first time so serious and systematic an approach will be employed. To begin with the lists of donors and non-donors will be related to membership in synagogues and organizations. Where there are children enrolled in any of the three school systems subsidized by central community funds, that fact will be noted. Children who go to Camp B'nai B'rith and families who use the Centre and other communal facilities will be identified.

The data will then be reviewed and analyzed and those who are financially able but are not carrying their share of the load, will be seen and the case for increased participation made to them.

The current drive to upgrade donors to standards of giving commensurate with their ability to pay is overdue in the opinion of many, says Mr. Zagerman. According to him, the issue was first aired at the opening meeting of the 1975 United Jewish Appeal when a dozen men whose combined gifts accounted for more than fifty percent of the total last year, raised a number of searching questions.

These are the points they made:

1. There have been significant changes in wealth over the past few years which are not being reflected in increased giving on the part of certain individuals.
2. It is not in the best interests of the community to depend on the handful of people who have been supplying the bulk of the funds in recent years. At present less than 10% of the donors account for over 80% of the donations.
3. We are compounding a basic injustice if we permit people of means to get away with token or inadequate contributions.
4. Despite careful budgeting, costs have risen sharply and campaign income has not been able to keep up. Unless everyone pulls his weight, we will fall farther and farther behind each year.
5. Israel needs more help than ever before and its people are making sacrifices on a scale hereto unknown. We have to match their heroism in the only way we can.
6. Membership in the Jewish community is like membership in a club. In order to have the privileges one must also assume the responsibilities.

Several of the largest contributors feel keenly about the issue. They do not mind paying their share but refuse to carry the ball any longer for people who can well afford to hold up their end of the overall obligation to Israel and the local community. They made it clear that unless steps are taken to rectify the situation, they may have to re-assess their own positions. This could result in the loss to the campaign of substantial sums of money through reductions or no gifts at all.

As a result, Mr. Zagerman convened a special meeting on April 6 which was attended by the heads of all the synagogues in the community, the Talmud Torah Board, the United Jewish Appeal, the Vaad Ha'Ir and the leading supporters of the campaign. The meeting lasted almost four hours and was characterized by sober and clear-thinking discussion. Full co-operation was pledged and a consensus reached which lays the framework against which the plan will be set in motion.

During the course of the meeting, the point was made that unless teeth are put into the plan, it will end up as only another pious declaration of good intent. While conceding that this may have been the case in the past, Mr. Zagerman said that this will not happen since "Operation Upgrade" is to become an integral part of the continuing agenda of Jewish community concerns from now on.

Moreover, a new Standing Committee of the Vaad will be struck and charged with the responsibility of implementing the decision. This committee will be composed of representatives of all groups and elements directly concerned. It will meet to define its terms of reference, to set guidelines and to develop a timetable for action.

The Standing Committee on "Operation Upgrade" will also have to look seriously at what can be done with individuals of means who despite all entreaties, refuse to give or whose participation is minimal at best.

A short and long-term approach has been suggested but nothing will be done until the committee sits down to discuss the matter in detail. Advocates feel, however, that in the short run, we ought to be looking at honours in the synagogue and in the community at large, membership on various boards and committees and availability of communal services. If all else fails, denial of membership in organizations or use of resources which the community finances may be the only alternative open.

Insofar as the 1975 Campaign is concerned, a target group of so-called "undergivers" is being identified and special committees will be calling on them to make the case for the United Jewish Appeal and its beneficiaries. The results of these exploratory forays will, to a large extent, influence the pattern to be followed in subsequent approaches.

In summing up the conclusions, Mr. Zagerman said he was gratified that those who were most vocal in advocating the need for consultation and re-appraisal came away encouraged by the sense of responsibility displayed by the men and women who attended the meeting. They realize that results will not be accomplished overnight and that the process will take time and patience over the course of several years. They know that giving is a personal matter in a voluntary society and that no man really knows another man's business or responsibilities.

"Still", he concluded, "what is being advocated should appeal to the highest instincts of every responsible man and woman in the Jewish community. A system of self-imposed taxation is really what it is all about—a kind of Jewish income tax to assure Jewish survival and improve the quality of Jewish life. This is not easy. We have no inspectors and there are no laws or penalties which a government can impose. Our appeal will be to the conscience and sense of responsibility of the individual. It will take tact, perseverance and great personal commitment, but in the end, I am confident we will succeed."



THE YEAR OF THE BOTTOM LINE.

If ever there was a year to sing the "bottom-line" blues, perhaps this is it. Stagflation and recession at home and overseas. In the Mid-East, yet more crises, more testing and tension. And at large, in the world arena: A feeling that if we're not careful the scales could be tipping more for might than right.

For our combined agencies and communitywide programs, the facts and figures add up as even harder. Vital Jewish services are in jeopardy of being cut back. For us all, the bottom line is an old question of choices. Hard choices. Can we hold the line?

The bottom line this year adds up to hard facts and harsher realities. Out of Russia, will we see the 60,000 that have been promised? Will we be able to do our share — to help see to it that they can come home to Israel?

For our brothers and sisters in Israel, the bottom line has been drawn as by a knife: The highest income tax in the world . . . devaluation that has cut the purchasing power of each family nearly in half. And from the Jewish Agency, recipient of our support and responsible for the absorption, resettlement of new immigrants, these harsh words — the scope of their programs may have to be narrowed, some portions even dropped.

This is the year, all right. When the "bottom line" of income and expense shapes up as dictating painful choices. Who comes first? What are the priorities? Who needs help soonest, fastest? Who can afford to wait? Who cannot?

From our own experience as an organized community, and from our very seasoned tradition, we know the answer to the

"bottom line" of reality. Stubborn faith and action. Each member of the Jewish family matters. Each member of the Jewish family is to be served. We proved it during the Yom Kippur War and the long aftermath. We need to, and we shall. And we can, now.

For our "bottom line" of truth — *emeth* — goes beyond arithmetic. Our "bottom line" is an ancient and tested Jewish response. It says that in the face of overwhelming odds, we manage to vote for life . . . and in the doing, tap new-found strength.

The challenge facing our Jewish community is not new. With your commitment and support, we shall again do what we must. For us there can be no distinction or question of priority. Jewish need and Jewish problems are co-equal and bound to each other. And we know this: If we are to help Russian Jewry, if we are to meet the human needs of the Israeli people, it will be possible so long as we continue to strengthen and reinforce the community-building services, centers, schools and agencies that are the bedrock of Jewish fellowship, leadership and our effectiveness.

Our bottom line is "yes". Support for all our fellows endangered and distressed. Unflinching support too. Support for the emergency. Support as well to the essential, every-day business of moving forward — of building a better and stronger Jewish community here in our town. Where it counts most. Here, where we have the power and the responsibility to fight for the "bottom-line" of life. L'chayim!

We pay attention to the everyday. And we're capable of near miracles too.

WE'RE A FAMILY. WE WORK AND ACT LIKE ONE.

WE'RE THE OTTAWA UNITED JEWISH APPEAL